



# Securing the High Ground:

## Dominant Combat Air Force for America



**2008 Combat Air Force Strategic Plan**

# COMBAT AIR FORCE STRATEGIC PLAN

28 JULY 2008



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## FOREWORD

*Securing the High Ground: Dominant Combat Air Force for America* is our strategy for the 21st century. It defines why we exist and focuses our effort and resources to meet the Nation's security and military strategies. Fully nested under the United States Air Force's Strategic Plan, this strategy outlines the Combat Air Force (CAF) critical contributions to protecting democracy and guarding freedom. This plan is a broad conceptual document backed by detailed supporting concepts and plans designed to enable the CAF to adapt and overcome the challenges created by a rapidly changing security environment. The strategy builds upon the CAF's foundation and heritage as the world's dominant combat air force. CAF leadership in innovation and integration, combined with the asymmetric advantage its forces provide to our Nation, ensures success for the joint force. From the ultimate backstop of our Nation's defense – nuclear deterrence – to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the long war on terror and across the full spectrum of conflict – the CAF defends our Nation now and in the future.

The 21st-century CAF is an innovative, organizational construct that will develop, plan and employ integrated, coercive combat capabilities – from air, space and cyberspace – to create war-winning effects for our Nation. ***Securing the High Ground*** provides the CAF its mission and vision while focusing the development, sustainment and execution of the preeminent combat airpower of America's joint force. It

provides guidance to all CAF Airmen, from those just entering service to those in the upper levels of command, from active duty, reservists and guardsmen, to our dedicated civilian workforce. The strategy, priorities and objectives described herein set the stage for follow-on development of a more detailed collection of operational concepts and planning documents that will integrate all CAF capabilities and ensure the realization of our vision...

**Dominant Combat Air Force...Always!**

*"Defending this great Nation demands intellectual solutions, not simply material ones. This document provides an integrated, Combat Air Force strategic planning effort that focuses development for a credible deterrent and effective fighting force... today, tomorrow and into the future."*

*General John D.W. Corley  
Commander, Air Combat Command*

**CAF Mission:**  
***Fly, Fight, and Win – integrating capabilities across air, space and cyberspace to deliver precise coercive effects in defense of our Nation and its global interests.***

**CAF Vision:**  
***Dominant Combat Air Force...Always!***





*THE COMBAT AIR FORCE  
DELIVERS  
GLOBAL VIGILANCE AND GLOBAL POWER FOR  
AMERICA  
THE ABILITY TO SENSE, INFLUENCE, DISSUADE,  
DETER AND STRIKE  
ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, IN ANY CONDITION  
THE CAF IS  
AMERICA'S ASYMMETRIC ADVANTAGE AND THE  
BACKBONE OF ITS SECURITY*

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*“In the development of air power, one has to look ahead and not backward and figure out what is going to happen, not too much what has happened.”*

*Brigadier General William “Billy” Mitchell, United States Army Air Service*





**PEOPLE  
FIRST...**

**MISSION  
ALWAYS...**



# INTRODUCTION

**Securing the High Ground** is the strategic plan for the “Tip of the Air Force Spear” – the Combat Air Force. It defines why the CAF exists and outlines the Ends, Ways and Means to enable the United States Air Force’s delivery of sovereign options in defense of our Nation.

Today, the United States is at war, facing a complex and rapidly changing security environment. This environment is characterized by a myriad of potential adversaries capable of operating across the spectrum of conflict. In addition, our Air Force is engaged in its eighteenth consecutive year of continuous combat operations, affording little to no opportunity to reset the force. The challenge of providing full spectrum deterrence, fighting the current war and forecasting the needs of the next conflict, demands a CAF strategy which optimizes the military capabilities of our Air Force by improving the flexibility, integration, synchronization and interoperability of combat power.

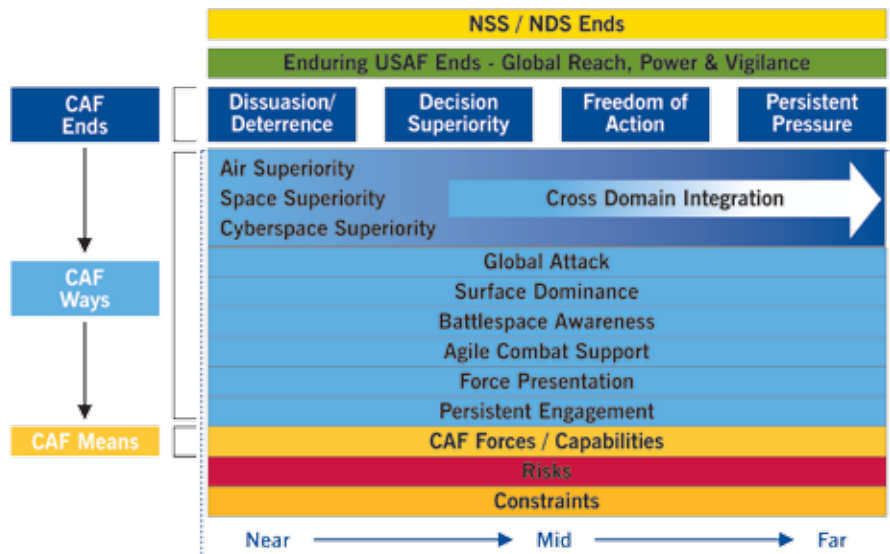
Our Airmen are the key ingredient in the execution of this strategy and the realization of our vision. The strategic importance of the Air Force’s commitment to remain America’s Guardians makes it imperative for the CAF to fully integrate its forces across air, space and cyberspace to assure the ability to deliver precise effects to protect democracy and guard our Nation’s freedom.



*Air Force Combat Rescue Team*

Strategy is simply the art and science of using our capabilities to achieve objectives. To build an effective strategy the CAF must have a clear understanding of the current and future security environment it will face across the spectrum of conflict, plus an understanding of the adaptive nature and operational stratagems of potential adversaries. This plan

## CAF Strategic Plan Framework



**Ends = Effects delivered to Nation**

**Ways = Operational Concepts**

**Means = Forces, Capabilities**

(Described in detail in the Framework section on page 8)

presents the CAF strategic approach to provide combat power for our Nation. It is the link connecting National, Department of Defense and Air Force strategic guidance to CAF activities providing Global Vigilance and Global Power through the synergistic integration of air, space and cyberspace Means.

**Securing the High Ground** provides over-arching guidance to CAF commands to facilitate the development, integration, and execution of CAF forces by Air Force Component headquarters in support of Joint Force Commanders. This strategy articulates what the CAF provides the Nation and how it will fight by defining operational concepts, prioritizing efforts to fully integrate the operational concepts, identifying required capabilities and guiding their development.

*“If our airforces are never used, they have achieved their finest goal.”*

*General Nathan F. Twining*

# CAF DEFINITION, MISSION AND VISION

Traditionally, the CAF was seen as solely “combat air power” or aircraft engaging in combat to destroy the enemy. But today, the definition of the CAF is more than just fighters, bombers and CSAR operating in the air. It is our air, space and cyberspace Airmen, organizations and capabilities delivering Global Vigilance and Global Power for the Nation. The CAF’s mission is to:

***Fly, Fight, and Win — integrating capabilities across air, space and cyberspace to deliver precise coercive effects in defense of our Nation and its global interests.***

**Our mission** defines who and what we are and why we exist. The CAF’s ability to control air, space and cyberspace provides an asymmetric advantage to our Nation. The core of the CAF is our Airmen — those active duty, reservists, guard members and civilians, who maintain, service, support, protect, supply and execute the mission. The CAF is the Nation’s full spectrum deterrence and response force of first and last resort, capable of delivering precise coercive effects across the full spectrum of conflict globally and rapidly in defense of our Nation.



The essence of the CAF is combat power. **Coercive effects** are what the CAF provides. Coercion is defined as the “threat of force or the use of force” to achieve stated objectives. Airpower theory depicts coercion as a continuum with **deterrence** on one end, represented by forward presence, military engagement and the threat of force; the middle, represented by the limited use of force to deny or disable adversary capabilities; and, on the far end of the continuum, destruction represented by the application of brute force. With the CAF’s ability to deliver coercive effects as the source of its strength and credibility, the CAF will provide precise effects across the full range of military operations and the spectrum of conflict.



The CAF plans, develops and executes coercive airpower options for our Nation. From the Air Force Component Headquarters to investment commands to our individual Airmen, the CAF is a collection of Air Force organizations, commands, and forces tasked to generate specific coercive effects from air, space and cyberspace.

The CAF has and will continue to provide USAF and joint warfighters with the most capable airpower in the world, engaging with partner nations, deterring adversaries before they take action and swiftly defeating enemies that threaten our national interests. This is why the CAF’s vision is clear.

## ***Dominant Combat Air Force...Always!***

To ensure our Nation’s security and its global interests we must always maintain this status; our vision will be backed by credible performance and an overmatch in capabilities. We cannot fail. We must focus our efforts on achieving this vision. Dominant combat airpower does more than just ensure success during conflicts. It deters adversaries from threatening not only our interests but also those of our partners and like-minded nations.



# THE GLOBAL STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

*"The most important thing is to have a flexible approach... The truth is no one knows exactly what air fighting will be like in the future. We can't say anything will stay like it is, but we also can't be certain the future will conform to particular theories, which so often, between the wars, have proven wrong."*

*Brigadier General Robin Olds, USAF*

The 21st century strategic environment presents an uncertain and dynamic picture framed by ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and numerous other regions; a broad range of potential conflicts and adversaries; and unprecedented information access. The rapidly developing "information age" enables a single individual act or person to generate strategic effects. It compresses decision-making time and blurs the traditional levels of both conflict and command. Technology and knowledge, combined with intent, allows almost anyone to influence populations and leadership actions.

Although the spectrum of conflict is unchanging, the growing number of actors with the potential to produce effects across the spectrum creates

added complexity and challenge. From non-state actors, terrorists and criminal networks exploiting seams created by "ungoverned spaces," to rising regional powers struggling with world perceptions, the complexity of the global security environment is increasing. Combine these factors with the proliferation of critical military and information technologies, growing ideological conflicts, evolving alliances, rising economic gaps, shifting demographics and growing demand for resources – the potential for conflict is increasing.

The future strategic environment will be shaped by the interaction of globalization, economic disparities and competition for resources. There will be increased diffusion of technology and information networks that will allow unprecedented ability to threaten advanced nations and have the potential to disrupt key international institutions and world order.

Accordingly, the CAF must be prepared to deter, dissuade or defeat irregular, catastrophic and disruptive challenges. These challenges cut across the conflict spectrum and may present national-level threats.

These challenges are summarized in six principal future strategic concerns:

- The lack of stability, security and integration of former Third World, or non-integrating "gap" nations and regions into the larger functioning "core" of peaceful, progressive states
- Violent extremism with regional and global reach
- Weapons-of-Mass Destruction (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-explosive) attacks on the U.S. homeland, interests abroad or our partners
- Disruptive threats to, in and from space and cyberspace
- The rise of a new peer or near-peer rival or competitor nation-state
- Maintaining allied, coalition and partner focus on shared strategic vision and objectives in an often ambiguous threat environment



*Taliban Fighter*

### **Most Likely Future Environment: *Persistent Irregular Challenges***

The most likely future environment is one characterized by the United States 1) maintaining its global leadership position amidst competitive pressure from peers or near-peers; 2) facing irregular challenges to include continued counterinsurgency and support to counterinsurgency efforts in partner nations; 3) global engagement in under-governed and ungoverned regions; and 4) stability, security and transition operations following US, coalition or UN peace enforcement activities.

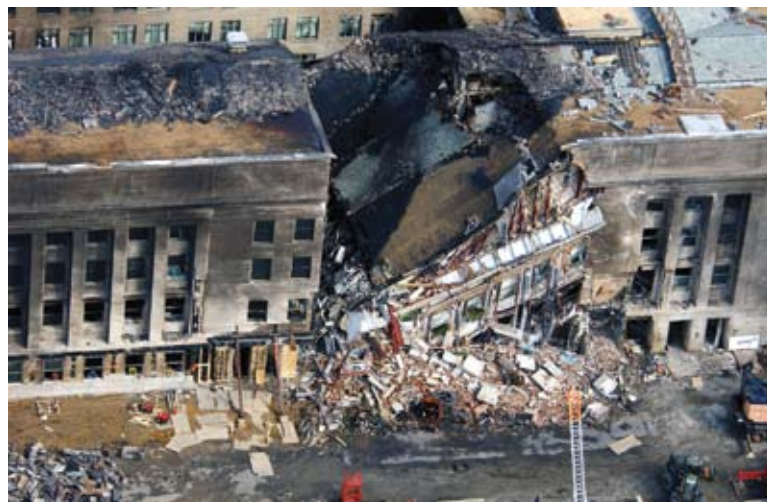


### **Most Challenging Future Environment: *Two Nearly Simultaneous Global Challenges***

The most challenging future environment is one in which two nearly simultaneous global challenges threaten American, allied and coalition interests. For planning purposes, this is defined as any two of the following: 1) catastrophic effects within the US homeland and/or against critical US national interests abroad; 2) a major combat operation against a peer or near-peer competitor; 3) a new irregular campaign on the scale of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF); or 4) a greatly increased level of effort in OIF/OEF.



*A Chinese SU-27 Flanker*



*Pentagon, 9-11-2001*



# EXECUTION

*"A modern, autonomous, and thoroughly trained Air Force in being at all times will not alone be sufficient, but without it there can be no national security."*

*General H.H. "Hap" Arnold, USAAF*

## Commanders' Intent

### Purpose

**Securing the High Ground** will guide the expanded integration and synchronization within the CAF to ensure our mission is met and our vision is realized. It is designed to ensure the CAF remains the Nation's asymmetric advantage and its most ready and effective full spectrum deterrence and response force. The execution of this strategy will expand CAF operational

concepts to meet increasing and emerging threats while pursuing better ways to address the growing challenges across the spectrum of conflict. This will position the CAF to meet the needs of today's conflicts without mortgaging the future security requirements of our Nation. Strategic planning guidance flowing from this strategy will guide implementation of Department of Defense and Service strategies in the CAF and ensure our mission and vision are achieved.

### Method

**Securing the High Ground** is framed in terms of Ends, Ways, Means and Risk. It outlines how the CAF will defend the Nation in the most likely and most challenging strategic environments. **Ends** are the effects the CAF delivers to the Combatant Commanders through Air Force Component Headquarters in defense of our Nation. CAF Ends are designed to ensure Air Force and the Nation's Ends are achieved. **Ways** are operational concepts or "how" our Means (Forces / Capabilities) are integrated to generate

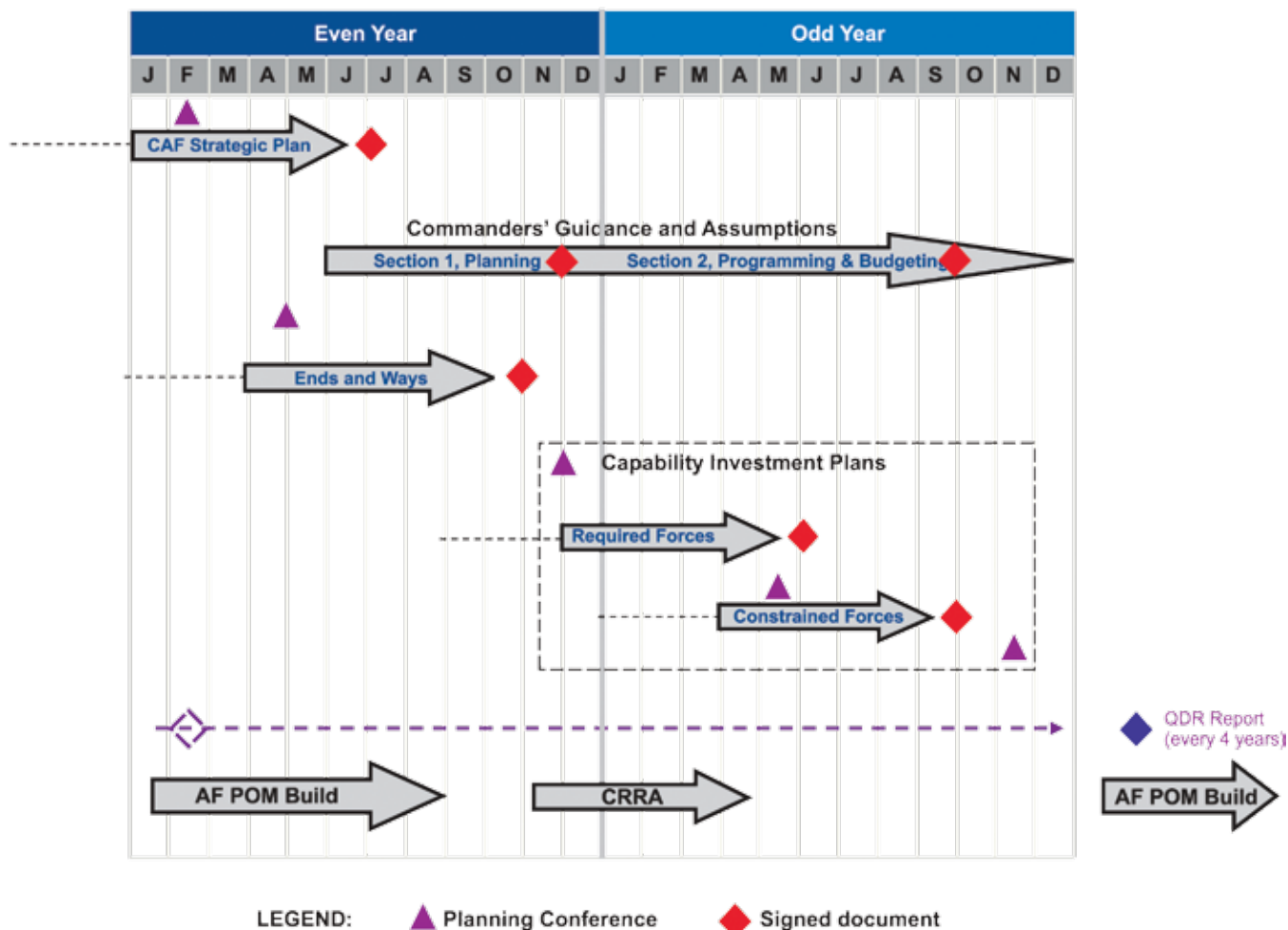


Figure 1. CAF 2-Year Strategic Planning Process

Ends. The CAF strategic planning process, guidance, priorities and tasks flowing from this strategy direct CAF implementation of the Air Force's strategy in the near- (0 to 5 years), mid- (5 to 15 years) and far-term (+15 years) timeframes. This strategy is executed by Air Force Component Headquarters through the integration and control of CAF forces with Mobility Air Forces and sister-service air arms /coalition air forces, and underwritten by CAF commands providing the organization, training and equipping of forces.

### Key Tasks

- ***Develop innovative, motivated CAF Airmen***
- ***Improve our current operations and effectiveness...Now.***
- ***Expand CAF operational concepts***
- ***Achieve cross-domain integration***
- ***Maintain the asymmetric advantage***
- ***Optimize warfighting organizations and processes***
- ***Prioritize recapitalization, modernization, sustainment and training***

### Key Tasks

The following are the CAF's priority lines of operation and drive everything we do.

- ***Develop innovative, motivated CAF Airmen*** as warrior leaders with international perspectives, strategic vision and operational warfighting



skills – capable of building relationships and steeped in CAF traditions and history – trained and educated to the highest standards in the world. This is the CAF's #1 task.

- ***Improve our current operations and effectiveness...Now.*** From nuclear operations to irregular warfare, we will ensure our expectations and standards to deliver the right effects demanded by our Nation's security are met or exceeded. Informed, educated, trained, and innovative Airmen have been and will be the key to CAF success. A culture that captures lessons learned and integrates them into the fight without delay will not only protect the Homeland, win today's fight and reaffirm the Nation's faith in our commitment to execute our nuclear mission but will create cascading benefits in the future. Operational concepts and critical capabilities must be relevant, adaptive and deployed sooner rather than later; it is imperative we win today's fight while continuing to prepare ourselves for the future.



*“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”*

*John F. Kennedy*



- **Expand CAF operational concepts** to address the spectrum of conflict and the full range of military



operations. These CONOPS and supporting concepts of employment (CONEMPS) will address peacetime military engagement activities such as building partnership capacity; irregular warfare activities such as counterinsurgency and foreign internal defense; and traditional challenges of a near-peer competitor with sophisticated and technologically advanced capabilities.

- **Achieve Cross Domain Integration** to ensure the achievement of our Ends and execution of our Ways in the increasingly complex, interconnected security environment



*Space Operator*

of the 21st century. Integrated air, space and cyberspace capabilities, systems, forces and operations, in and through all domains, will deliver precise effects for the joint force commander across the full range of military operations.



- **Maintain the asymmetric advantage** the CAF provides the Nation by proactively developing and executing advanced operational concepts with the capabilities and capacity to deliver precise effects in the defense of our Nation's current and future security interests across the full spectrum of conflict anywhere on the globe.
- **Optimize warfighting organizations and processes** to emphasize the pivotal, conflict-winning roles played



by innovative, flexible approaches to operational art and command and control. These approaches deliver conflict-winning strategies through unity of command.

- **Prioritize recapitalization, modernization, sustainment and training** to meet future challenges while ensuring the needs of the warfighter are met today. Cognizant



*RC-12*

of the future security environment faced by our Nation, the CAF will examine a "balancing" of our capabilities and a systemic or system-of-systems approach to enable employment of operational concepts across the width and breadth of the spectrum of conflict.

## **Endstate**

CAF Ends and ultimately the Nation's Ends are realized through our ability to maintain and continue to be recognized as the world's dominant Combat Air Force.

## Framework

*Securing the High Ground's* strategic framework is a vehicle for visualizing the CAF strategy and the interrelationships of our Ends, Ways and Means and is illustrated in Figure 2.

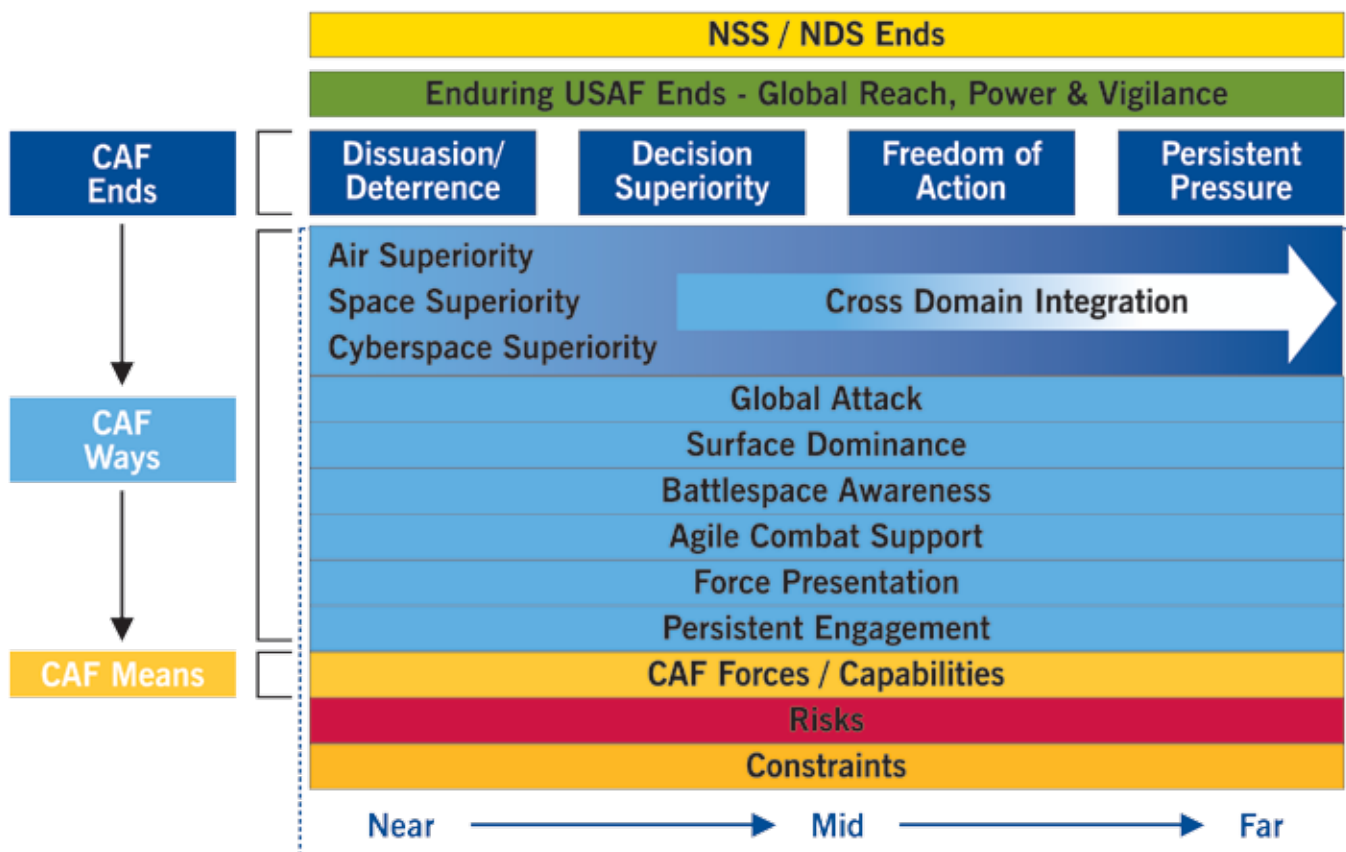


Figure 2. CAF Strategic Plan Framework

### CAF Ends

**Dissuasion and Deterrence** are the dual abilities to discourage potential adversaries from acting contrary to our national objectives or interests.



Missile Launch Crew

Dissuasion provides the credibility that adversary activities can always be countered by our Nation. Deterrence is the credible threat of force in response to hostile adversary actions. The CAF's contribution to full spectrum deterrence spans from our capabilities to deliver nuclear response options to precision tactical operations anywhere on the globe at a moment's notice. Both help maintain regional and global stability and security. Dissuasion and Deterrence are the foundation of global shaping and engagement activities, and the keystone of a lasting peace between nuclear capable nations that has never been broken.

**Decision Superiority** is the ability to see first, understand first and act first. It provides the Nation and the joint force the ability to make sound, fact-based and correct decisions faster than the enemy, thus dominating our adversary's decision loop and strategy. Decision-makers residing in joint headquarters, operations





CRC Site

centers and battle management nodes execute command and control through information derived from intelligence sources, surveillance and reconnaissance sensors and automated decision aids. This enables decision-makers to anticipate adversary actions and degrade the enemy's freedom of action by seizing and maintaining the decision initiative.

**Freedom of Action** is freedom from and to attack. It provides the joint force the ability to execute sovereign options required to ensure our security, when, where and how we choose. It enables all instruments of national power - diplomatic, information, military and economic. It predicates all joint operations across the spectrum of conflict and can never be taken for granted.

**Persistent Pressure** provides the joint force coercive pressure in the form of multidimensional, distributed, coordinated, lethal or non-lethal effects on an adversary; locking down areas of interest and denying enemy freedom of action. It seizes the initiative and denies adversary objectives, ultimately defeating their strategy by demanding decisions or actions counter to their plans more rapidly than their capability to adapt and overcome.



## CAF Ways

### Air, Space and Cyberspace Superiority

is how the CAF secures joint and coalition freedom of action. It permits the conduct of operations across these domains at a given time and place without prohibitive interference by the opposing force. These operational concepts include localized superiority in pursuit of supremacy and persistent effects.

While superiority within air, space and cyberspace are each individually vital, the key asymmetric advantage in the future security environment is the integration of operations, forces, systems, training and capabilities to produce synergistic effects in the near term with the goal of supporting cross domain integration in the far term. Air, Space and



*"Although attacks in the cybersphere do not involve use of physical weapons, their destructive impacts, physical and otherwise, may be no less lethal to societies."*

*Jeffrey R. Cooper  
"Another View of Information Warfare"*

Cyberspace Superiority enable freedom of action for the joint force across the spectrum of conflict and full range of military operations by providing a "high ground" position and perspective.

**Global Attack** is how the CAF attacks rapidly anywhere, at any time, in all conditions. It creates effects that hold adversary targets and strategies at risk anywhere, at any time. Global Attack makes the CAF a unique and indispensable instrument of national power; it holds the position of primacy among Air Force sovereign options. Global Attack is the backbone of dissuasion and deterrence; it delivers full spectrum deterrence for our nation and is potentially the nation's most decisive, preemptive element or counter of an adversary's aggression. It dissuades potential

adversaries and deters enemies by maintaining credible global strike forces, to include nuclear, cyberspace, conventional and special operations with a proven ability to deliver decisive effects anywhere, any time and in all conditions.



**Surface Dominance** is the application of coercive pressure through persistent strike operations and presence to influence, manipulate or dismantle an opponent's strategy, leadership, infrastructure or forces, both physically and psychologically.



*Iraqi Defeat, 1991*

Surface Dominance, independently or in conjunction with joint maneuver and fire, drives the enemy into a disadvantaged position, enabling the joint force to compel the adversary to abandon their objectives and/or capitulate.

**Battlespace Awareness** is how the CAF secures the required comprehensive knowledge and full understanding of the operational area's environment, limiting factors and rapidly changing conditions to successfully apply combat power, protect the force and complete the mission. Battlespace Awareness includes the status and disposition of friendly and adversary forces, neutrals and noncombatants, environmental conditions and terrain. This enables timely, relevant, comprehensive and accurate assessments, which facilitates the commander's ability to monitor, assess, plan and execute.



*RC-135 Rivet Joint*

Providing the joint force the ability to see first, understand first and act first is vital. Proactive decisions, based on sound knowledge and cultural understanding, are more influential than those executed reactively.

**Agile Combat Support (ACS)** is how the CAF creates, protects and sustains air, space, cyberspace and special operations forces across the full range of military operations. The ACS operational concept makes no distinction between combat and non-combat processes. The CAF provides deployed ACS through Expeditionary Combat Support and Reachback Combat Support. Reachback encompasses the overall network that transfers support from areas of available capability to areas of needed capability; it includes support from theater-, rear-, or CONUS-based organizations.

**Force Presentation** is how the CAF achieves synergy, integration and employs forces to meet Combatant Commander requirements. This includes collaboration across the services and the interagency – generating initiatives and integration



across all warfighting domains. It creates the ability to command and control assigned / attached forces through the Theater Air Control System. Command and control of intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, special operations and strike assets in an artful but effective way is central to success in the Information Age.



**Persistent Engagement** is how the CAF sets conditions and shapes the environment to one conducive to ensuring achievement of combatant commander and national objectives. It is a holistic approach to shape the underlying conditions that foster conflict, assure and build partner capacity, deter actors from attacking our interests and disrupt adversary actions through forward presence and credible combat capability.



*Lifting child to safety, Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans*



*Reconstruction Team, Panjshir Province, Afghanistan*

### CAF Means

CAF Means are our forces, systems and capabilities. Air Force Component HQs integrate CAF Means through our Ways to produce Ends for Combatant Commanders. Our capabilities are developed by CAF MAJCOMs and ultimately produce resources – personnel, forces, materiel and other physical assets. Our most critical Means are innovative, motivated, well-trained and highly professional, team-oriented people. Each of the CAF Means represents either primary or enabling capabilities required to execute a Way. The Means may evolve over the near, mid and far timeframes and each have various constraints and risks associated with them. The Means are described in detail in Annex D.



*Hearts and Minds, Damerjog, Djibouti*

*“Once the command of the air is obtained by one of the contended armies,  
the war must become a conflict between a seeing host and one that is blind.”*

*H.G. Wells*



## Risks And Constraints

Risks, from the perspective of delivering our Ends to the Nation, are reflected in four areas: operational, future challenges, force management and institutional. Operational risks are those associated with the current force executing the strategy successfully within acceptable human, material, financial and strategic costs. Future challenges risks are those associated with the CAF's capacity to execute missions successfully against an array of prospective future challenges. Force management risks are those associated with managing CAF forces fulfilling the Ways described in this strategic plan. Institutional risks are those associated with the capacity of new command, management and business practices – those risks inherent in our processes, procedures and organizational structures.

For a strategy to be successful it needs to be pragmatic, especially in the near- and mid-terms, carefully delineating risks and constraints, identifying mitigations and taking action to ensure success. Since constraints are the driving factor in any consideration of risk, one of the surest mitigations in this area is a prioritization of effort to most efficiently use available time and resources. Such prioritization inherently accepts risk in less important parts of the strategy. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve the desired Ends while minimizing negative consequences.



*A-10 with battle damage*

Constraints and risks are considered, detailed and mitigated at all levels of strategic planning. The CAF strategic plan annexes will each delineate constraints and risks as appropriate to their level of planning and detail, providing and implementing mitigations as appropriate. The matrix (Figure 3) lists notional examples of risks and mitigations to executing this strategy and delivering CAF Ends to the Nation.

Risks	Mitigation
<b><i>Operational</i></b> Capacity (personnel and systems): sustained combatant commander requirements limiting pursuit of expanded operations or aims	Prioritize current combatant commander requirements over possible future requirements.
<b><i>Future Challenges</i></b> Space as a contested domain	Aggressively pursue advanced technical and operational counters to emerging threats
<b><i>Force Management</i></b> Technological: some envisioned capabilities or effects may continue to be beyond our technical ability to realize	Aggressively pursue advanced technical solutions to stay at the leading edge of technological innovation
<b><i>Institutional</i></b> Failure to develop adequate command, management and business practices	Develop adequate command, management and business practices

*Figure 3: CAF Strategic Plan Risk / Mitigation Matrix (Notional)*



## Strategic Approach

*“Air power is like poker. A second-best hand is like none at all – it will cost you dough and win you nothing.”*

*General George Kenney*

To address the most likely and most challenging security environments our Nation may face in the 21st century, the CAF will fully integrate its air, space and cyberspace operations through its Ways to deliver its Ends, across the full spectrum of conflict. We will examine our interdependencies across each of the domains to ensure delivery of the Ends in the near, mid and far phases of this strategy. This strategic approach highlights the importance of both defending the homeland as well as winning the current fight by effectively executing persistent irregular warfare operations, while at the same time deterring adversaries or defeating such adversaries if deterrence should fail. The details of each End and Way are located in Annex C of this plan.

CAF Ends are not mutually exclusive. The interrelationships and interdependencies demand integration / harmonization and allow for the shifting of levels of efforts to facilitate delivery of effects and success for the joint force. The Ends



are achieved most effectively and efficiently by gaining and maintaining a decisive combat edge in terms of capability, sufficiency and credibility in the eyes of potential adversaries. Maintaining a combat edge requires the CAF to aggressively pursue improvement of the operational concepts inherent to each CAF Way and to seek continual improvement through exploration of innovative concepts, advanced capabilities, game-changing technologies and world-class training systems.

Preventing conflict is the best way to ensure our Nation's security and represents a key element to this strategic approach. The CAF End **Dissuasion and Deterrence** is focused on this aim. Credible combat capability backed by persistent engagement and a thorough knowledge of the operating environment are critical to both dissuading international actors from becoming adversaries as well as deterring adversaries from taking action contrary to U.S. national interests. The CAF's credibility to dissuade and deter hinges on the threat of force – holding adversary capabilities and vulnerabilities at risk anywhere, any time – and the Ways and Means to back-up the threat of force, if required. The CAF delivers this through a full spectrum approach to deterrence from nuclear to low end conventional



*U-2 pilot prepares for mission*



or cyber operations. The expansion of our ability to deliver this End across the spectrum of conflict and against the myriad of international actors is crucial to our Nation's security in the future. Ultimately, the CAF prevents war by shaping the strategic choices of neutrals, allies, rivals and adversaries through its presence and credibility as the World's Dominant Combat Air Force.

**Decision Superiority** delivered by the CAF is the decisive edge the joint force needs to generate success. No strategy can be successful nor can our Nation's security be assured without a clear understanding of the problem set and of the nature of the conflict we are in. This ability to "know your enemy and know yourself"



*F-16 Maintenance, Balad Air Base, Iraq*



*MQ-1 Predator Crew Chief*

across the spectrum of conflict is increasingly difficult to gain and maintain in the information / knowledge infused security environment of today and tomorrow. **Decision Superiority** is the decisive edge the joint force needs to generate success. Each link in the kill chain relies on timely and accurate information to enable effective decisions. The faster commanders can visualize and understand the situation, the faster they can make decisions to counter the enemy's intent before they can take action. **Decision Superiority** enables commanders to successfully accomplish their objectives faster with fewer casualties. The effectiveness of **Decision Superiority** and the find, fix, track, target, engage and assess (F2T2EA) kill chain is directly linked to quality and quantity of Battlespace Awareness information.

The CAF ensures **Freedom of Action** for the joint force and the Nation through the control,

protection and exploitation of the air, space and cyberspace domains. These domains collectively are the "high ground" of joint operations, much as a high surface position such as a ridgeline is pivotal in land warfare. Traditionally, the CAF delivered **Freedom of Action** to the joint force by obtaining and maintaining air superiority and air supremacy. The modern era of conflict brought to the forefront the importance of space superiority, and now the information age requires cyberspace superiority. Today, superiority in one of these domains cannot be assured without obtaining it in the other two, thus the CAF must obtain cross domain integration - the synergistic advantage of integrating air, space and cyberspace superiority to enable **Freedom of Action** for the Nation. Superiority in these three domains sets the conditions for follow-on activity for all of the instruments of national power. The CAF must adopt a new, integrated, seamless Air Force operational concept which fuses our actions in air, space and cyberspace into a single employment approach.



*Predator Ground Station*



**Persistent Pressure** reflects a continuing evolution of CAF integrated capabilities. The CAF brings to the Nation the ability to directly or indirectly attack an adversary's strategy and centers of gravity across the full breadth and depth of a conflict. As airpower theories, operational concepts and doctrine have evolved with the changing strategic



*Combat Air Force trains Iraqi Firefighters, Baghdad, Iraq*

environment and potential adversaries, so has our view on strategic attack. The CAF End of *Persistent Pressure* reflects this evolution through the integration of air, space and cyberspace capabilities to hold an adversary's strategy in "check" or place it in "checkmate" if required. Rapid, persistent influence or strike operations manipulate or, if need be, dismantle an opponent's ability to act, either physically or psychologically. The character of potential adversaries, compression of the decision cycle and the blurring of the traditional levels of conflict make it imperative for the CAF to update and expand its ability to attack the strategy and power of potential adversaries across the spectrum of conflict and full range of military operations in order to rapidly and decisively dictate the

outcome of a conflict. This is as important during "peace" as it is during combat conditions.

Integration and success in this strategy requires a thorough examination of how we fight today and how our operational concepts will evolve in the future.

These Ways must be structured and integrated to directly produce the intended effects... the CAF Ends. As with the Ends, CAF Ways are not mutually exclusive or tied to a single End. The CAF Ways are intended to contribute to the attainment of full spectrum superiority throughout all phases of a joint campaign. To dissuade and deter, the priority is to clearly and credibly establish superior capabilities over our adversaries in order to shape the environment. When conflict is necessary, our focus shifts from *possessing* superior capability to dominating our adversaries. As the CAF transitions from combat to stabilization and peace, our focus again changes back to ensuring our superior capabilities enable civil authorities and deter future conflict. This flexibility is our key to success and drives the importance of



*Emergency Response Team, Kirkuk Regional Air Base, Iraq*



*Providing parts for the Afghan National Army Air Corps, Kabul*

developing and continuing to update the CAF Ways in the near, mid and far timeframes.

Perhaps the most detailed task is to integrate CAF Means. The Means, our forces and capabilities are not merely the systems; they are the people, training and employment concepts created to produce the desired effects. We will continue to develop future capabilities from multi-role systems, those that cut across capability areas and are focused to execute the Ways and to produce the desired Ends. The capability planning for CAF Means is contained in Annex D, *Capability Investment Plans*, which must maintain sufficient force structure and capabilities to execute our





*An Iraqi policeman has iris scan*

Ways, in the near, mid and far, most likely and most challenging security environments.

There is a balance in this strategic approach between the ability to actively engage across the globe to promote a greater stability, collective security and trust amongst global partners and the development and maintenance of combat forces capable of defending our homeland and national interests against near-peer adversaries. The last twenty years have showcased the remarkable success of allied and coalition military operations, not just in the execution of decisive combat operations but also in securing a better peace and in the prevention of hostilities through effective military engagement, peace-keeping and peace-enforcement activities. CAF Airmen are on the leading edge of peacetime military engagement, irregular warfare and stability, security, transition and reconstruction (SSTR) operations. The speed, range, flexibility and versatility of air,



*Air Force Provincial Reconstruction Team member inspects school construction, Panjshir province, Afghanistan*



*Convoy driver, Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan*

space, cyberspace and special operations forces allow for the rapid connection of people, materiel and ideas. These bring greater integration and understanding to disconnected, ungoverned and failing territories and regions; strengthen existing and emerging partnerships through assess, train, advise and assist missions; supply and support host nation forces defending against insurgents and terrorists; and support coalition forces in SSTR.

America has maintained a forward presence throughout the world since its ascendance as a global power in the first quarter of the 20th century. In this era of reduced forward military presence, the CAF's strategic approach requires a renewed commitment to air, space, cyberspace and special operations forces which can be positioned forward. The CAF will develop an effective, predictive framework for modeling a global engagement environment and produce adequate forces to address the needs of





*Airmen assist Afghani medical team*

excess. With fiscal constraints tightening, our Air Force and the CAF must be good stewards of our Nation's resources. Our goal is to retain overwhelming capability within reasonable fiscal constraints, to deter conflict and to win quickly when conflict is unavoidable. Follow-on annex work will outline how the CAF will address the most challenging environment with a realization of the risks and constraints in doing so.

that environment, while providing deployment stability and predictability for CAF Airmen. Critical regions and evolving potential adversaries require the CAF to look at expanding partnerships around the globe and to explore opportunities to increase or reposition our forward / rotational base locations. CAF presence serves to assure our allies and partners, building confidence/trust by, with and through partners throughout the regions influenced by CAF Airmen. Building partnership capacity and theater security cooperation will remain key elements for the CAF in helping to set conditions and shape the environment before and during conflicts.

Finally, to adequately address the most challenging future environment, the CAF must ensure capability overmatch and sufficiency to meet the requirements of two nearly simultaneous global challenges. Capability overmatch is not synonymous with





## CONCLUSION

*Securing the High Ground* provides the foundation for the 21st century CAF to develop, plan and employ integrated, coercive combat capabilities across the spectrum of conflict and through the synergistic effects of air, space and cyberspace. Within the context of the global security environment, this plan describes the Ends, Ways and Means required to execute the CAF Mission and to realize our Vision. The CAF organizes, trains and equips to influence and defeat our adversaries in the most likely as well as the most challenging environments. While we must prepare to win any conflict in the future, we are at war today...and that is where our focus remains.



To simultaneously win today's war while preparing for tomorrow's conflict within resource limits, we will have to accept risk in specific capabilities. Our nation's military superiority in air and space however, cannot be sacrificed. Airpower has been a critical constant in every conflict since our inception as a service in 1947, and contributions during operations such as Noble Eagle, OEF and OIF are no less remarkable. Thousands of lives have been saved solely because of our capability to deliver Global Vigilance and Global Power. Additionally, the criticality of space and especially cyberspace will grow rapidly, and we must take action now to protect



and as required dominate space and cyberspace to protect our Airmen and our joint partners.

It must be emphasized again that team-building Airmen are the foundation of the Combat Air Force. Their dedication, sacrifice and service stand shoulder to shoulder with the proud traditions and legacy of the pioneers of military aviation. As we move forward into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must continue to identify and nurture our





upcoming leaders who, with the audacity of Brigadier General “Billy” Mitchell, the statesmanship of General Henry “Hap” Arnold and the vision of General Bernard Schriever will carry the CAF into the future.

***Securing the High Ground*** lays out seven key tasks to focus our efforts. Through these tasks, we will accomplish our mission to ***Fly, Fight, and Win – integrating capabilities across air, space and cyberspace to deliver precise coercive effects***

***in defense of our Nation and its global interests.***

The follow-on work to develop the annexes within this plan...from developing integrated operational concepts, to building capabilities focused on the Nation’s priorities, to harnessing the dedication and innovation of our Airmen...will provide additional guidance and focus to attain the CAF Vision to be the world’s **Dominant Combat Air Force...Always!**



*“Not to have an adequate air force in the present state of the world is to compromise the foundations of national freedom and independence.”*

*Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 14 March 1933*

# ANNEXES

## **Annex A – CAF Strategic Planning Process (CSPP):**

Provides the guidance, timeline and methodology for all CAF planning, programming, budgeting and execution activities. The CSPP is on a 2-year cycle aligned with the DoD Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution System process, and will include references to specific MAJCOM instructions as appropriate. Note: This product should be developed or revised within 30 days of the CSP being signed and published. ACC is OPR, and all other CAF MAJCOMs are OCRs.

## **Annex B – Commanders' Guidance and Assumptions:**

Provides focused commanders' guidance, assumptions, modeling and scenarios at each phase of the CSPP

**Annex C – CAF Ends and Ways: Detailed description of each End and Way.** CAF Ends and Ways (operational concepts) describe how the CAF will fight or deliver its Ends in the near, mid and far timeframes to include linkage to Air Force CONOPS, doctrine and interrelationships between the Ways. The CAF Ends concept describes the interrelationships between the ends and introduces the CAF Ways. Each Way identifies challenges, milestones and primary and enabling Means (capabilities).

**Annex D – Capability Investment Plans:** Describes CAF Means (capabilities and forces) to execute the CAF strategy. Formerly CAF and other MAJCOM Strategic Master Plans or equivalents, these plans provide integrated, synchronized force structure and capability

planning in the near, mid and far timeframes. This annex will provide a unified CAF position for MAJCOM and Air Force-level programming during the POM. The current plans for each command can be accessed at:

ACC, PACAF, USAFE and ACC-gained ARC (CAF SMP): <http://www.acc.af.smil.mil/xp/xps/>

AFSPC (Strategic Recapitalization Plan):  
<http://www.afspc.af.smil.mil/xp/xpx>

AFSOC: <http://afsofnet.afsoc.af.smil.mil/pages/default.aspx>

AFCYBER: not yet finalized.

**Annex E – Force Development:** Describes the total development of CAF Airmen from recruitment through retirement to include education, training and desired operational and professional experience.

**Annex F – Total Force Integration:** Describes the strategic vision and path for developing the active duty-reserve component integrated force best capable of meeting the CAF Vision, end state and Ends stated within the strategic plan.

**Annex G – Networking:** Describes the CAF vision for networking and network-centric warfare 20 years from today.

**Annex H – Classified Supplements:** Will include additional info on CAF Ways and Means plus more specific strategic/operating environment assessment.



# COMBAT AIR FORCE STRATEGIC PLAN

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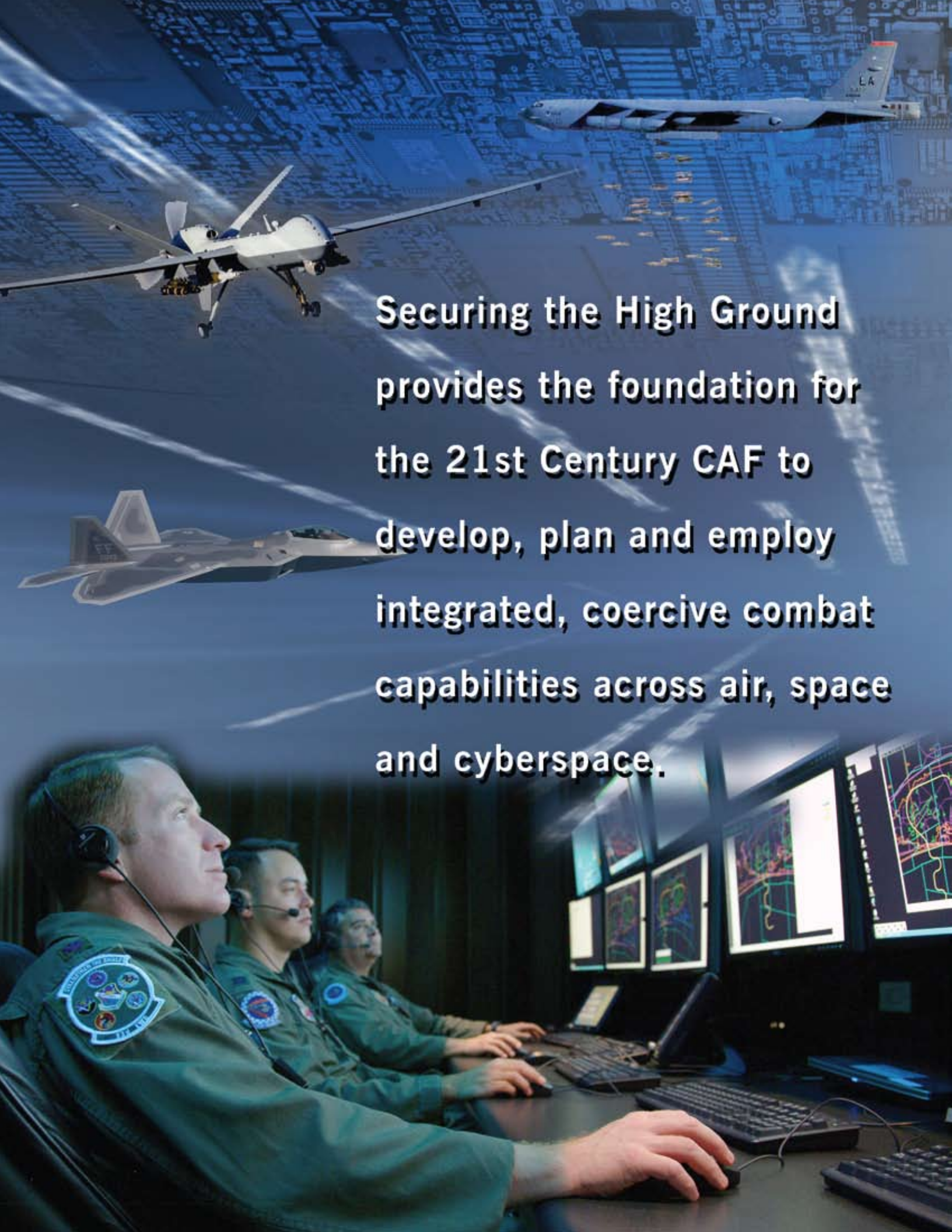


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This document is available online at the Air Force Portal:  
[https://wwwd.my.af.mil/afknprod/strat\\_plan](https://wwwd.my.af.mil/afknprod/strat_plan)



**Securing the High Ground  
provides the foundation for  
the 21st Century CAF to  
develop, plan and employ  
integrated, coercive combat  
capabilities across air, space  
and cyberspace.**